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Nick Carter Stories



DAZAAR, THE ARCH FIEND
OR
THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN DEVILS
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No. 41.

NEW YORK, June 21, 1913.

Price Five Cents.

DAZAAR, THE ARCH FIEND; Or, THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN DEVILS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN ASSASSIN'S SILENT DEED.

When Nick Carter endeavored to insert his key in the night latch of the door of his Madison Avenue residence, in New York, he discovered, much to his surprise, that it would not work. Nevertheless, he made a second effort, but with the same result. Then he pressed the electric button which communicated with a bell in Patsy's room.

"Something has happened to the lock, Patsy," he said, when the door was opened a moment later. "Take a look at it, will you, while I am getting into more comfortable togs."

Instead of obeying, Patsy closed the door and immediately followed his chief up the stairs. Neither spoke again until they were inside Nick's study; but then the detective turned to his young assistant with a smile.

"So you have already examined the door?" he said. "You already know what is the matter with it, eh? You don't think it necessary to make a second examination?"

"No," replied Patsy. "I haven't made any examination of the lock, but I know what is the matter with it. I haven't been outside the door since the thing happened, but I can tell you exactly what is embedded in that Yale keyhole as well as if I had applied a magnifying glass to it. This may sound like 'blowing' on my part, but I can do it, just the same."

"Good! Suppose, in that case, that you tell me."

"It's the point of a knife."

"Eh? The point of a knife, did you say?"

Nick threw his coat into a chair, seated himself in another, lighted a cigar, and prepared himself for Patsy's explanation.

"That is exactly what I said," continued Patsy, "and, in my opinion, a man who can throw a knife across a

forty-foot street and hit the keyhole of a Yale lock, is worthy of consideration, especially when he says that some day, when he gets good and ready, he intends to throw one into the vitals of Nick Carter."

Nick smiled.

"I wonder how many times my life has been sworn away, Patsy," he said dryly. "For the sake of amusement, I wish I had kept some memoranda of those threats."

"It wouldn't pay to count them," returned Patsy.

"No, nor to devote much time and attention to them, either."

"I'm not so sure about that, sir. This is a threat which comes under such circumstances that perhaps even you may give it some time and attention. I think this occasion is worth both time and attention."

"Oh, you do, eh? Then suppose you tell me all about it. I can see that you are brimming over with information, Pat. Get down to business. What has happened? What is this threat of a knife coming sailing through the air at my vitals?"

"Well, to begin, when the postman came around on his last delivery, he left a letter addressed to me. Here it is."

He passed the letter over to Nick, who read:

"As soon as you receive this, go down and try your key in the lock of the front door. You will find that it works perfectly. When you have done that, take your station in Mr. Carter's room, directly above the door, and watch through your clever contrivance which I know exists, to see that nobody tampers with the lock. Carter will be home at seven-thirty, if he keeps an engagement he has made, and, therefore, should arrive about half an hour after you receive this.

"When he does arrive, he will not be able to work the lock because the point of my knife will have filled the

place where the key should fit, and if you search, probably you will find somewhere around the door the rest of the knife which will have broken off and fallen when I throw it.

"Tell him, when he comes, that a man who can hit a keyhole across the street, will find a way to reach his heart. That is all now—but there will be more later."

"Original," commented Nick, dropping the scrawled paper upon the table. "Well, Patsy, what more?"

"That's all. I watched the door. Not a soul came near it till you arrived, but it is evident that the writer of that letter has kept his word. We will have to give him credit for that, to say the least."

"Quite so. Did you see him throw the knife?"

"No."

"What did you see?"

"Nothing at all out of the ordinary. You see, in the first place I didn't believe, had no idea, in fact, that a man could throw a knife from across the street and hit that keyhole, so I arranged the reflectors to keep tabs on the spot he intended to hit, and on the street on our own side directly in front of the door."

"You thought his talk about the other side of the street was a bluff to distract your attention."

"Exactly that."

"And it wasn't, after all?"

"No. The remarkable part of it all is that by a strange chance my eyes happened to be fixed directly upon the keyhole when the knife struck it, and I actually saw the thing done without seeing who did it."

"But you looked across the street at once, didn't you?"

"Sure I did."

"What did you see?"

"Three men passing by. Two were going east and the other was going west. One of the men going east was walking rapidly, and the other quite slowly. The one going west was traveling at an ordinary gait. They seemed to bear no relation to one another, and I couldn't even conjecture which one threw the knife."

"Even if one of them did so."

"One of them must have done it."

"Why?"

"Because there wasn't another soul in sight on the block at the time."

"Well, you couldn't very well follow all three of them, could you?"

"No. I thought the best thing was to wait for you."

"Quite right. Go down, now, and see if you can find the broken knife. I'll examine the lock for the point in the morning."

While Patsy was gone, Nick read the letter a second time.

"It isn't this fellow's marksmanship in knife throwing that makes this interesting, half so much as his confessed knowledge about my evening engagement," he mused. "These chaps always have a weak spot somewhere in their armor, and he really ought not to have told about that, although I can make nothing of it at the present moment."

Just as the great detective had reached this stage in his ruminating, Patsy entered the room.

"Well, Patsy," said Nick, "did you discover the broken knife?"

"I found two," was Patsy's rather startling reply, as he

placed two knives upon the table, side by side, before his chief. "The one with the point broken off was in the area, where it rolled after it hit the door."

"And where was the other one?" questioned Nick, showing considerable interest.

"It came across the street of its own accord just as I stepped into the vestibule and closed the door."

"I see. It just walked across, like an ordinary person, eh?"

"No. It flew across, like a bird, I suppose. I heard it strike the door, and I was outside again before you could say Jack Robinson. There wasn't a soul in sight in either direction, and there wasn't a door or window open anywhere; but there is the knife."

"So I see. Well, leave them here and go back downstairs. In about two minutes from now a gentleman, with whom I have an appointment, will call. You may take him into the library, and say that I will be down directly. He is tall, well-dressed, rather aristocratic in appearance, and trims his iron-gray beard to a point. He will give the name of Thompson. We will give our attention to this knife thrower in the morning."

Patsy left the room obediently and descended to the front door. While he was on the stairs, halfway down, he heard the purr of a motor as an automobile came to a stop before the house, and a moment later the bell rang.

It was the chauffeur of a taxicab who stood upon the steps outside when Patsy opened the door, and he seemed greatly excited.

"I've got a fare inside, who said he wanted to come here, but he's fainted, or something. I can't rouse him. I suppose you'll know him, and maybe you'll help me to get him out of the cab and into the house. He was all right when I picked him up."

"Sure," said Patsy, and, never dreaming of the actual state of things, he hastened down the steps to the open door of the cab.

One glance at the huddled figure inside told him that it belonged to the man whom the detective had just described to him, and a second glance revealed the mystery of his condition.

Just beneath his left arm, where the driver of the cab had failed to discover it, protruded the short, thick, club-like hilt of a knife of precisely the same pattern as those already in the possession of the detective, and, instantly, Patsy knew that Nick Carter's expected client was dead, that he had been murdered while on his way to keep his engagement with the expert, and that the same hand which had thrown the knife point into the keyhole from across the street, and which had sent another knife into the door behind his own person, had done this awful and silent deed of death.

Even while Patsy hesitated in the first instant of astonished consternation, Nick Carter himself leaped down the steps, and, thrusting his assistant and the chauffeur to one side, leaned into the open cab.

One rapid but thorough survey of the interior was all he required.

"Act quickly, and keep silent," he commanded, in low, incisive tones. "Carry the body directly to the study, Patsy. Keep the driver there with you. Send Ten-Ichi out here to stay by the automobile."

Fortunately there were no pedestrians upon the street in the immediate vicinity at the time, and the incident,

therefore, passed entirely unnoticed by others, as even Nick believed, although, as a matter of fact, there was one pair of alien eyes not far distant, which narrowly watched every motion and circumstance—and which smiled with keen amusement upon the occurrence.

The man who owned those eyes that smiled, also showed his gleaming white teeth and handsome features at a near-by window for just one instant of time; but Nick saw nothing of these.

Then Ten-Ichi, Nick Carter's Japanese assistant, came to take charge of the automobile, and the detective entered the house.

CHAPTER II.

THERE, BUT DEAD.

Nick's first care, when he entered the house, was to attend without delay upon the body of the man which had been deposited at his door so strangely.

He had discovered, at a glance, that it was the same distinguished-appearing gentleman with whom he had conversed not two hours before, and who at that time had made the engagement with him at his own house for a quarter before eight o'clock—the engagement about which the mysterious knife thrower seemed to be so thoroughly informed, and which, in the present aspect of the situation, was the sole and only clew that Nick had to work with in discovering the unknown assassin, who was, without doubt, also the author of the letter of warning that Patsy had received.

Nick was not aware of the dead man's name.

To be sure, the gentleman had given a name during the time they had conversed together, but he had announced at the same time that it was not his real name, and was merely given as a means of identification for the purposes of his interview with the detective.

Their talk had consumed not more than three or four minutes; it had taken place close beside the fountain in Union Square, when there was not another person within earshot, so that it was impossible that anybody could have overheard any part of their arrangements, and Carter felt quite positive, because of the evident anxiety and sincerity of the man, that he had not made a confidant of any person after that brief interview.

Yet, if that were indeed true, how was it possible that the knife thrower could have known of the engagement—as he must have known of it—within a very few moments of the time it was made? Nick had certainly not mentioned the fact to anybody save Patsy.

Even in death, the body of the man had preserved its air of distinguished respectability. The man looked to have been between fifty and sixty years of age, tall, well-formed, and expensively attired. He had told Nick to address him by the name of Thompson, for the purposes of their interview, and that after it had taken place he should disappear.

In brief, the simple account of their meeting was this:

Nick had been crossing Union Square on his way to the Emmet Hotel, where he had made a short engagement which he did not expect would occupy him more than a moment or two, and it was his intention to go from there directly to his home.

He was without disguise of any kind at the time, which, as has often been said in these pages, was in many re-

spects, the best disguise he could assume, for the reason that it was a rule with him never to work upon a case except in disguise. That is to say, he worked upon a case as his natural self only when it seemed more advisable for him to do so.

Notwithstanding this fact, as he was passing the fountain he was confronted by the very man who now lay dead before him. The man stepped directly before the detective, and so brought him to an abrupt halt.

Their conversation, word for word, was this:

"I hope you will pardon me, sir, for stopping you in this manner," said the stranger, "and I hope you will listen to what I have to say."

"Speak on," replied Nick. "What do you wish to say?"

"First, am I correct in assuming that you are Mr. Nicholas Carter?"

"You are quite correct."

"Then, sir, I would be under an obligation to you if you would receive me at your house at any hour this evening which may be most convenient for you."

"My reason for making this request is not to place a case in your charge professionally, but to make you acquainted with the particulars of a great peril that is hanging over your life daily, and which may fall upon you at any moment."

Nick smiled, and, doubtless, there was more or less of incredulity in his expression, for the stranger continued rapidly:

"I beg, sir, that you will believe in my sincerity, and that you will not regard with contempt the seriousness of the condition which I shall describe to you. I assure you that I would not thrust myself, or my sad story, upon your notice, were it not that the extreme gravity of the case compels me to act."

"You might begin by telling me who you are," said Nick. "I shall then know whom to thank for this forthcoming information."

"Let me be plain Mr. Thompson for this occasion, Mr. Carter. It is not my name, but it will suffice for the purposes of our interview."

"Very well, Mr. Thompson. What is the story you have to tell me?"

"It is one that I cannot relate here. You will wish to question me, I know, and I am prepared to reply to every question you may ask, even including the relation of my name and my family affairs, if you insist upon it and will make the appointment I have asked for."

"You should, I think, tell me enough now to make it an inducement for me to see you," Nick said to him, smiling. "I do believe in your sincerity, for your countenance tells me that you are in earnest; but I also believe that it is more than probable that you are over-estimating the importance of what you have to communicate."

The stranger shook his head.

"I have good reason for believing the contrary," he said, very earnestly.

"If you knew," continued Nick, "half the number of times my life has been sworn away, you would wonder that I am alive to-day; and yet I have seldom been very seriously wounded."

"I can believe that, sir, and yet it may be a repetition of the story of the pitcher that goes too often to the well."

"Oh, yes. I am never unmindful of warning, although I may seem to treat them with contempt."

"Very well, Mr. Carter. I must speak hastily; but here is the condition which I wish to explain fully and in detail to you at your home, or at any place where we are sure of being alone and undisturbed."

He paused and glanced quickly around him, as if to make sure that they were beyond the hearing of a third person, a fact of which the detective was already cognizant. Then he continued his warning.

"There is at present in this city a man who possesses every attribute and appearance of a saint, every gift and talent of a statesman and a diplomat, the knowledge and learning of a scholar and a savant, and the experience and wisdom of a Wandering Jew. Sometimes, in fact, I am compelled to the belief that the legend of the Wandering Jew is correct, and that this individual is indeed he, because of the power and profundity of his ability and wisdom."

"Rather a remarkable person," said Nick, smiling at this unusual tribute.

"Remarkable indeed! You will assent to that statement seriously when I have told you everything, as I shall do later."

"Imagine, if you can, one man who possesses all the knowledge for which scientists crave; whose experience is so wide that it includes every corner of the earth; who has mastered every detail of human knowledge and achieved a degree of intelligence and learning that is entirely beyond the ken of an ordinary man; who has the stature, the bearing, the carriage of a prince among his fellows; whose age is unknown, but who readily passes for thirty; who is as handsome of feature as a Greek god, as graceful as an Apollo, as strong as a Hercules, as wily as an Indian, as implacable as a snake, as unrelenting as death, and as cruel as Dante's worst conception of hell; who has a voice as soothing as the purring of a cat, a touch as soft as velvet, and an outward appearance and manifestation of kindness which is the envy of genuine philanthropists."

"Imagine, in short, a veritable devil clothed in the form of a god; a human being whose favorite pastime is to drive men and women mad by reason of the mental torture he knows so well how to inflict; who gloats over human agony, suffering, and torture with the same sort of passionate intensity that an artist would give to color, that a scientist would devote to a new salt, or that a beautiful woman would bestow upon her ideal lover."

"Imagine a man whose nature is so distorted that he has become the exact antithesis of mortal life so that he sees an existing hell wherever happiness reigns, and whose heaven is comprehended only in the hideous sufferings of his fellow man."

"You draw a strong picture, Mr. Thompson."

"I draw a true picture. It cannot be overdrawn."

"You know this man?"

"I am, without doubt, the only living person who does know him for what he really is. I am one of his victims, perhaps the only one who has ever been admitted to personal knowledge of him."

Nick gazed at Thompson sharply, as if he were almost inclined to think him mentally lacking. Then he questioned him sternly:

"What is his name? Where does he live? Who is he?"

"He changes his name as he does his coat or hat. I will give you these details when I talk with you later. His nationality nobody knows. I will give you the benefit of every whit of the knowledge I possess when I see you to-night."

"Why am I supposed to be in peril from this man? Does he know me?"

"No. He selects his victims without hatred—for no cause, in fact, save that he delights to make the happy suffer, and to render the successful desperate. When he has glutted himself with the suffering and torture of a person, he kills the miserable victim. I happen to know that he has made choice of you as being the most interesting subject he has ever worked upon."

"Why?"

"Because he regards you as worthy of his diabolic machinations. I can quote him. 'There is a chap,' he said, 'who will fight me at every turn, who will counter for every blow just as long as he is able to do so. I have watched his career, and it will give me the greatest joy that life has so far offered me to destroy him.'"

"Humph! Well, perhaps he is not so far wrong in that surmise. I will confess that you have interested me, Mr. Thompson. There is my card. Come to me at a quarter of eight. I will be expecting you."

"I will be there, Mr. Carter, if I am alive, and God grant that I may be."

"You may go with me now, if you like."

"No, no! I cannot. I dare not."

"Your case has interested me. Perhaps I might be of service to you."

"I thank you, sir, but I am personally beyond helping. If I can save you, it will not matter what becomes of me. I will keep the appointment, and I will be at your house at a quarter of eight, if I am alive."

"Thompson" did keep his appointment. He was at Nick Carter's house at a quarter of eight, as he promised, but when he arrived he was dead. From him, Nick Carter would never learn of this mysterious person who was so anxious to cross swords with him. His lips were forever sealed. It would have to be from some other source, from grim experience, that Nick would glean his information.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLEVER JAPANESE.

The foregoing, then, comprised all that Nick Carter knew concerning the man with whom he had made the appointment, and who at that moment was stretched before him, dead, with a knife buried in his body beneath his left arm.

When he left Ten-Ichi in charge of the taxicab, Nick hastened to the room where the body was laid, and, directing Patsy to conduct the chauffeur to another room and to keep him there until further orders, he closed the door and gave his entire attention to the body of Thompson, whose death had been brought about in so mysterious a manner.

A thorough search, however, revealed absolutely nothing.

There was not so much as a scrap of paper upon the person of the murdered man. Save for an ordinary latch-key, a penknife, a fountain pen, and a pencil and a roll of bills amounting to nearly a hundred dollars, the pockets

of the man's clothing were empty. Nor was there a mark of any kind upon his linen.

This last fact was a great disappointment to the detective, for he had really expected to find the imprint of a public laundry upon the cuffs, the collar, or the shirt, and by that means to trace, with little or no difficulty, the location of the house from which the laundryman had received it.

The examination, which resulted in nothing, occupied a very few minutes of time, and Nick found, after it was over, that he was no better informed than he had been before the cab stopped at the door, save for the one assurance which the murder had given him. This assurance came from the fact that the victim of that crime—the man who had stopped him in Union Square and begged for the appointment—had not deceived him concerning the strange being whose avocation in life was to make others suffer.

He rejoined Patsy and the driver, and, having directed the former to make the proper report to the coroner, questioned the latter.

"Now, my man, tell me all you know about this circumstance," he demanded of the chauffeur, who stood, first resting his weight on one foot and then on the other, while he nervously shifted his hat back and forth from his right to his left hand, not liking the great detective's close scrutiny.

"I don't know a thing more than I have already told the other gentleman," said the driver. "My name is Chris Merrill, and I stand with my cab at Union Square. This man what's dead now comes up to me, and, says he, look in' at a card he held in his hand while he said it, says he, 'Take me around to this house, and when you have left me there you can drive away, for I shall not want you any more.' With that, he tears up the card into bits and chucks 'em into the street. Then he pays me on the spot, with a quarter extra, for bringin' him here, and he climbs into the cab."

Merrill paused and wiped his brows. Nick saw that he was greatly agitated, and that he was really as ignorant of the real causes of the stranger's death as he appeared to be.

"Go on," he commanded gently. "Just tell me what actually occurred; no more and no less."

"Well, then, he says to me," continued Merrill, "'Shut the cab window.' But it was broken, and I couldn't shut it, and I told him so, and, says he, 'If I had known that I would have taken another cab.' For a minute I thought he was going to do that, anyhow, but I told him I would get him here in a jiffy, and, as he had already paid me, he leaned back against the cushions and told me to go ahead. I jumped in behind the wheel, chucked on the power, and drove here as fast as I could, and, so help me God, I am telling you true, boss, that is all I know about it."

"Did any one call to you or to him while you were on the way here?" questioned Nick.

"Not a soul."

"And he did not call from the cab?"

"If he did, I didn't hear him do it."

"Was there any person at all whom you noticed along the street while you were on the way here?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Don't you know positively?"

"Well, I didn't exactly notice anybody, only I did notice another cab."

"How was that?"

"It was this way, sir: I drove up Broadway from Union Square, until I got to Twenty-third Street, and then I wheeled around to the right and came up Madison Avenue. Just as we passed the watering fountain, opposite the Metropolitan Life Building, on Madison Square, I noticed that a cab had wheeled out of the bunch that stands there, and was trying to pass me."

"Was it one of the regular cabs that stand on that station?"

"I can't answer that, sir, because I don't know."

"Well, go ahead with your story."

"I've got a pretty good motor under the hood of my taxi, and I let her out a little more. I didn't want to be passed."

"I see. What then?"

"Well, the other fellow let out his machine, too, and we went from halfway between Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Streets, almost to Twenty-sixth Street, neck and neck. Then, when we had got almost to Twenty-sixth Street, the fare who was inside the other cab somehow lost his hat out of the window, and they had to stop to get it. I just gave them the glad ha-ha, and drove on."

"I see. On which side did the other cab try to pass you?"

"On the left side."

"And the broken window of your cab is on the left side, too, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Did you see the face of the man who was inside the other cab?"

"No."

"Did you see him reach out his arm?"

"I don't think I did."

"Aren't you sure?"

"I think I saw him swing out his arm and try to catch his hat, but I wouldn't swear to it. Maybe I did, and again maybe I didn't. We were going pretty fast just then."

"All the same, Chris, it was the man who was inside that cab who threw the knife that killed your fare."

"Sure, sir, sure! I see it all as plain as day now."

"Did you see anything else that you have forgotten to tell me?"

"No, sir, nothing."

"Did you take a good look at the chauffeur of the other taxicab?"

"I only took one glance at him to see if he was known to me, when he tried to pass me. I didn't know him, and I didn't look at him again."

"So you could not identify him?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Nor the cab?"

"I might know either, or both, if I should happen to see them again, and I might not know either. I think I might know the cab by the footboard in front of the chauffeur's seat, but I can't say I'm certain that I would. You see, he didn't pass me, so I didn't get a chance to glimpse his number. It was a black car, of that I am sure, and I feel pretty confident it was a free lancer."

"You mean by that that the chauffeur probably owned

or rented the cab, and went about, here and there, picking up what fares he could?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you ever see this man whom you brought here before to-day?"

"Yes, sir. I've seen him every day for a week, and I don't know but longer."

"Where?"

"In Union Square, sir."

"Nowhere else?"

"No, sir. He has been coming there every day for a week or more, about half past four or five o'clock in the afternoon, and walkin' 'round and 'round that fountain for two hours at a time. He always acted as if he was lookin' for somebody who never came, and about seven o'clock he always lit out, and I didn't see him any more till the next day."

"He was looking for somebody, Chris, take my word for that. He was looking for me. To-day he found me, and because he found me he is dead. Do you know who I am, Chris?"

"Well, sir, I know your name is Carter, and so I suppose you are some relation to the great detective, Nick Carter."

"You are right, Chris; Nick Carter is a relative of mine. Would you like to do a little work for the detective?"

"That I should, sir. And proud I should be to do it, too," Chris added, his eyes glowing with anticipation.

"Very well. Hire out your cab to another chauffeur and take a week off. During the week all you will have to do will be to wander round the street where cabs go and keep a sharp lookout for the cab, or the chauffeur who was behind the wheel of the cab that tried to pass you to-day. I will pay you five dollars a day for your time, and if you find either the chauffeur or the cab I will give you twenty-five dollars extra. Come back here to me the moment you have got something to report, and if I am not here wait till I come. But don't come here, unless you have something to tell me, until your week is up. That is all. You may go now; only remember one thing: You are not to utter a word of anything that has taken place in connection with this matter to any person whatever."

When Chris Merrill drove away from the house Nick called Ten-Ichi into the room where the body of "Mr. Thompson" was awaiting the arrival of the coroner.

"Take a good look at that dead man, Ten-Ichi," he said, "while I get a flash-light picture of the face. I will want you to-morrow to make me as perfect a pen-and-ink sketch of him as he would look in life, as you can make. The flashlight will help you, but you must get the details of his dress and general appearance now, for the coroner will be here presently and take the body away."

Nick then left Ten-Ichi alone in the room with the dead man. Five minutes later he returned.

"Are you through?" he asked, seeing Ten-Ichi put aside the drawing he had been making while Nick was out of the room.

"Yes, sir, I have finished."

"Good! The drawing is excellent. Now come with me into the study. I want to talk to you."

When the door of Nick's sanctum had closed behind them, he continued:

"You told me, at the time you entered my employ a week ago to-day that your greatest ambition was to become a detective, and that you believed you would make a good one, but you declined to tell me anything about yourself, save that your home is in Japan, that you are highly connected in that country, that you were sent to this country on a special mission, and that part of that mission consists in the acquirement of great detective skill, and that you were directed, if possible, to learn the business from me."

"You also told me one thing which pleased me more than anything else you said, which was that you had never told a soul that you wished to find me, or that you had business with me, and that you finally discovered me and came to me solely through your own efforts. Is all that the absolute truth, Ten-Ichi?"

"Yes, sir, as far as it goes."

"Have you anything more to tell me?"

"Nothing that is of consequence, most worshipful—"

"Drop all that, please. I don't want any Japanese titles used here. Let me hear all your story again. I have tried you for a week, and I have found you, thus far, all right. I am inclined to accept your statements, and to teach you the detective business, simply on the strength of my personal judgment of you. To-night I have a mind to start you out on something which will act as a developer, so tell me your story again."

"It is only this, Mr. Carter: I was sent here on a special mission, and by one who is high in authority in my own country. I was told to assume the name of Ten-Ichi, to which I have a family claim. Part of my instructions consisted in the direction to find you, and, if possible, to serve an apprenticeship under you."

"How long an apprenticeship?"

"That is dependent upon your honorable pleasure with me, and upon my ability to please you and to serve you to your satisfaction."

"Good! Well, what else?"

"Nothing else, Mr. Carter."

"But there is more."

"When my apprenticeship has been served satisfactorily to you, there is more for me to tell you—then."

Nick smiled.

"I am beginning to like you, Ten-Ichi," he said. "Now tell me what you can do."

"I have been well educated, Mr. Carter. I speak seven languages as well as I do my own. I am master of fence, I know the Japanese attack and defense, I am very strong and very quick, and there are other accomplishments which I have developed in my own country which will please you when I have occasion to make use of them, but which I need not mention now. I will serve you faithfully, honorable sir."

"I believe, you will, Ten-Ichi, and I'm going to give you a trial. You have made a good likeness of the dead man in the other room. Now you shall be my assistant in running down the man who threw the knife that killed him. Your work on this case will establish you with me, or send you out in search of other employment. It is up to you, Ten-Ichi."

Ten-Ichi, his face a smooth, brown, clear-cut mask, bowed respectfully to the great detective.

"I will do my best to serve you well," he said, in his soft voice, and then he retired from the study.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WHO THREW THE KNIFE.

At the breakfast table, the following morning, Nick found this letter:

"MY DEAR SIR: It is because I feel an unusual respect for your abilities as a man and as a detective that I am moved to write this letter; also, because I suppose that our mutual friend, 'Mr. Thompson,' who is now, alas! no more, told you, during that interview between you in Union Square, more or less that was descriptive of myself and my career. I do not, of course, know just how much he did tell you, and, as you are aware, I saw to it in a most emphatic way that he should not have an opportunity to add anything to the knowledge you had already gained.

"It had been my intention, Mr. Carter, to enjoy a season of comedy at your expense, and I can assure you upon my honor that I had no desire to begin operations with a tragedy. Thompson compelled me to that extreme, and the fact that his life has paid the forfeit for his temerity is no more than he expected, and no more than he deserved. I killed him because I saw that he would materially interfere with my pleasures, as I had mapped them out in the comedy that I intend to play, with you as the central figure.

"My comedies, as you will perceive when you have had experience with me, partake much of the general characters of curtain raisers. I make use of them to precede the tragedy which inevitably follows.

"I have selected you to fill the star part in this performance, merely because I consider you to be in every way worth my while. You have intelligence, strength, ability, and courage, and permit me to assure you that each one of these qualities wins my admiration always. It is so rare to find them combined within the nature of one person.

"I repeat that I have no idea how much or how little Thompson may have told you concerning me. It is certain, however, that by telling you anything he spoiled utterly the plans I had outlined for the campaign, for I wished to work in the dark for a considerable time, so as to puzzle you concerning the reason for inexplicable events that were to happen in your life through my instrumentality. It is too bad, is it not? I could easily have worked a whole year upon your affairs without your having the least idea that I existed at all, and I could have reveled in the joys of your absolute ignorance.

"But now you know that I exist. Thompson has told you. My plans are, therefore, altered.

"You are a foeman worthy of my steel, and I therefore throw down the gauntlet of challenge, feeling that it is possible that I may get quite as much solace and pleasure out of this method of procedure as I could have done out of the other, and regretting only that the conflict—which must surely end in your death—may, while it lasts, be as pleasurable to you as to me.

"I am pained when any act of mine brings pleasure to another, but there are, of course, times when that condition cannot be avoided. This is one of them.

"I wish to assure you that I have no feeling of personal dislike against you in this matter, but, nevertheless, I promise you that from this moment it is my purpose to pursue you without abatement, until you are dead,

and I know that I am the direct cause of your death if not the actual instrument which brings it about.

"However, we will not hasten, nor need we anticipate the thrilling climax. I like to catch mice alive and give them to cats to sport with, and I like to catch men alive and sport with them in much the same manner, until they die, or I become tired with the game and put them out of existence.

"I have caught you now in precisely that manner, and the fact that you do not realize it, and that you still think and believe that you will be able to escape, or even that you can best me in the struggle, is my greatest delight.

"It was I who threw the knife into the keyhole of your door last night. It was I who, later, mercifully waited until your assistant had passed inside before I sent another and second knife across the street to embed itself in the door where he had been standing a moment before, and it was I who placed a weapon of the same type and character under Thompson's arm in order that he might not reveal any more facts concerning me to you.

"I have those knives made to order. I wish you would examine the samples in your possession. You will discover that they are of exquisite workmanship, and you will not discover where or by whom they are manufactured. One hundred of them will weigh exactly one hundred times more than one. They are perfect.

"That is all, Mr. Carter.

"I cannot tell you how long a time you have to live. It may be a week, a month, a year, or five years. All that depends upon the entertainment and amusement you afford me in the combat.

"Doubtless you will hear from me again. I am fond of writing letters to my victims. I consider anonymous correspondence one of the chief refinements of torture!

"Of one thing you may be sure: You will see and talk with me often. I shall take especial delight and care to bring about such meetings. It is one of my pleasures to know intimately men whom I intend ultimately to destroy.

"If I signed a name to this, it would not be the true one, so I will sign no name at all."

Nick took Ten-Ichi to his study with him after breakfast and showed him the letter.

"What do you make out of it?" he asked, when the young Japanese returned it to him.

"We have a proverb in my country which says that letter writers and idiots are born as twins," was the reply.

"But this chap is no fool, Ten-Ichi."

The Jap shrugged his shoulders.

"You seem to be of a different opinion," said Nick.

"He has written a letter, he has announced himself, he has given us something to work upon, he has stated his intention, he has placed you on your guard. If he is not a fool, he is at least a braggart."

"Right you are, my lad."

"Braggarts dislike to remain unnoticed."

"Right again."

"May I make a suggestion?"

"That is what you are here for."

"Then I would advise paying no attention to the man or his works at the present time."

"Thinking that he will do something to betray himself? Is that your idea?"

"Thinking that he will at least write another letter."

"Even if he does nothing more, eh?"

"Yes. But as soon as he discovers that you are treating him and his threats with contempt, he will do something."

"Right again, Ten-Ichi."

"What was done with the body of Thompson, honorable, sir?"

"It was taken to the undertakers, it should be at the morgue by this time."

"You are having it watched?"

"Assuredly."

"May I defer retouching of the portrait, and keep the body in view for a time?"

"Certainly. You had better go at once, too. You and I, Ten-Ichi, will have to see this business through alone. Patsy and Chick are both absorbed in another matter that will keep them engaged for a week or more. Skip along, now, and don't be surprised if you should see me at the morgue before you leave there. By the way, Ten-Ichi, wait a moment. There is another thing I wish to ask you."

"Well, sir?"

"Are you good at disguises? Don't you think you should have one?"

"I am unknown here, sir, and perhaps I will not need one. If I should—"

"Well? If you should?"

"I'll see what I can do after I get on the ground."

"All right. Go ahead. Work it out in your own way. I'll follow you up after a while."

"Yes, honorable sir. I will be on the lookout for you."

After Ten-Ichi left the room Nick remained for a considerable time in silent cogitation. Presently, however, he lighted a cigar and sent for Patsy.

"What is your opinion of the Jap, Patsy?" he asked. "You have had a good chance to observe him; now tell me what you think of him."

"I think he is a pretty slick article, if anybody should happen to step off the elevator and ask you," was Patsy's reply. "He's a sort of human weasel, and you'll find that it won't be an easy matter to catch him napping."

"He does the kid act to beat the band," continued the young oracle, "but, all the same, I reckon he's older than he would have you think. Why, there have been times since he has been here when you'd think he wasn't seven yet, and there have been other times when one might swear that he was seventy."

"Has he told you how old he is?" asked Nick.

"No. When I asked him he showed his teeth and smiled. All the same, chief, I like him."

"Good! So do I. What does Chick have to say about him?"

"He's said mighty little."

"Chick never does say very much. He has the natural reserve of people who think a great deal more than they talk. But what has he said about Ten-Ichi."

"This: 'That little Jap has got a Saratoga trunk packed full and locked and strapped, stowed away in the top of his head. When the time comes he'll undo the straps and raise the lid, but until then we'll know very little more about him than we do now.' That's

what Chick said to me. We both sort of reckon that he's all right."

"So do I, Patsy; but, all the same, I want to be a little bit more certain. Can Chick spare you from that case you two are working on, for to-day, dō you think?"

"He has spared me. I've got a day off, as far as he is concerned."

"In that case, suppose you take Ten-Ichi's trail for the day? Just keep your eyes on him without regard to anything else. I have just sent him to the morgue to keep an eye on the body of Thompson, and I think I'll send you along after him to watch the whole outfit."

"Right, chief; I will hop right out on the trail."

CHAPTER V.

CARTER'S KEEN INTUITION.

Whatever Nick's intentions may have been for his disposal of the morning, they were doomed to be sidetracked for an interval at least.

Patsy had not been absent from the house half an hour when a messenger boy brought Nick a short note from a gentleman whom he knew very well, asking him as an especial favor to come at once, for half an hour only, to the bank of which he—the writer—was president.

The note assured the detective that the call had nothing whatever to do with the affairs of the bank, but that a customer and large depositor had begged him to bring about an interview, and that he hoped that Nick would find it possible to come, if only for a few moments.

So Nick went, assuring himself that, having sent Patsy to the morgue, it was not necessary that he should be there in person before noon.

It was Simon Gray, president of the Travelers' International Bank, who had sent for him, and the time yet lacked a quarter of an hour of ten when the detective made his appearance.

When he entered the president's private office, he noticed that there was a third party there: another man who stood with his back toward them, looking out upon the passing vehicles in the street.

"So glad that you were able to come, Carter," exclaimed Mr. Gray, rising and shaking the detective's hand. "I feared that you might not be available at such short notice."

Nick wore the disguise that he almost always assumed when he had business to transact with the Wall Street element and the business men of New York—the only one, in fact, by which they knew him at all, and which every one of them believed to be Nick Carter in *propria persona*.

It was merely an older, somewhat portlier and more substantial imitation of the real Nick Carter, so nearly like himself that a close observer might easily have mistaken him for an older brother of the detective, and so utterly unlike himself that, notwithstanding the indefinable resemblance, no one would ever have thought of confounding him in that sense with the Nick Carter whom we know in the privacy of his study. He simply looked and acted the part of a shrewd, prosperous business man of the financial section of the city.

"I took you at your word when you persisted to detain me only a short time," replied Nick, while he made one quick but comprehensive survey of the man near the window, who now turned and confronted him.

The result of that glance was indefinitely pleasing. The qualifying adverb is used because there were only three degrees in which the detective regarded strangers. They met with his approval, disapproval, or his utter indifference.

While Nick felt a sense of approval in that first glance he bestowed upon the stranger, he was vaguely conscious that he could not, with the first glance, tell the reason for that impression. A second look, taken while they were acknowledging the banker's introduction, relegated the entire situation to the realm of indifference.

"This is the gentleman to whom I had reference in my letter," said the banker. "Permit me to make you acquainted with each other. Señor Don Murillo Cortez, this is Mr. Carter, whom you desired to meet. And now that the ice is broken I will leave you to your own devices for a few moments."

"I am greatly indebted to you for coming here, Mr. Carter," said the stranger, in a wonderfully vibrant and melodious voice, "more particularly as I am on the point of leaving the city for a few days, and desired to make an appointment with you for my return. I wish to-day merely to say that I have some important matters that I would like to place in your charge, and that if you will fix a time to see me, say this day week, I would be very glad to consult you. In the meantime I will, of course, pay you a substantial retainer."

"What is the character of the business you wish me to do?" asked Nick abruptly, while he took in every detail of the tall, graceful, athletic figure, the perfect carriage, the handsome features, inscrutable but remarkable eyes, white teeth, and perfect bearing of Señor Cortez. "Doubtless Mr. Gray has told you that it is a rule with me to know the particulars of a case before I consent to take it."

"He has—yes. Frankly, Mr. Carter, and in a word, I have lost my wife and I want you to find her for me."

Both men were seated now, and Nick merely nodded his acknowledgment of the statement.

"It is not a recent loss, Mr. Carter. She has been gone more than a year—or, to be exact, just thirteen months to-day. During that time I have exhausted every resource that I could command in the effort to find her, but without avail."

"Will you tell me the circumstances of your wife's disappearance?"

"We were in London. She went out in her carriage for a drive, as was her daily custom. From that day until one week ago there has never been a trace of her."

"What happened a week ago?"

"I received an anonymous letter informing me that she is in this city, that it is the intention of her abductors to drive her insane, that when she is quite mad—incurably so, she will be returned to me, and that all my fortune is not sufficient to ransom her."

"Last evening, about ten o'clock, I received through the mail, by special delivery, a photograph of her, evidently taken by an amateur with a kodak. It bore the inscription: 'Merely to assure you that there is no mistake!'"

"Had your wife any reason, that you are aware of, for running away from you?"

"She had not."

"You were fond of each other?"

"Devoted."

"And you still love her? Pardon such a personal question?"

"I am as deeply in love with her to-day as I was the day we were married; and we certainly loved each other then!"

"How long have you been in New York?"

"Two months."

"Have you the kodak photograph with you now?"

"No. I regret to say that I locked it in the safe last night and neglected to bring it with me this morning."

"You say you are called out of the city to-day? When do you return?"

"Probably the day after to-morrow."

"Very well. You can let me know, through Mr. Gray, when you are here. In the meantime, if you care to send me the picture and the writing you have received, I will, perhaps, think over the circumstance. In the meantime, Señor Cortez, in anticipation of our interview, permit me to make a suggestion."

"Certainly, Mr. Carter."

"When you are ill, call in the doctor, and if you intend to take his remedies, tell him the truth. When you have business troubles, call upon your lawyer, and if you wish him to win your suit, or to prevent you from engaging in a losing one, tell him the truth. When you have lost a wife and you desire my services to find her for you, if you expect me to serve you at all, tell me the truth. At present you have lied to me. Good day, sir."

With a quick turn, the detective left the president's room before Señor Cortez could reply to him, and, although he plainly heard the latter call to him to return, he kept on his way.

In a moment he was in the street, and in another he had turned the corner, leaped through a doorway, and was soon in his downtown office.

Five minutes sufficed him to make the changes he desired, and within ten, from the time he left the counting room of the Travelers' International Bank, he was before the door again, although on the opposite side of the street.

But neither Mr. Gray nor Señor Cortez would have recognized him now.

The portly, prosperous, substantial appearance had disappeared, the individual who walked up Nassau Street close behind the figure of Señor Cortez was merely a counterpart of the thousands of nondescript individuals whom one may meet on that thoroughfare at any and every hour of the day. A clerk out for an airing, a young man in search of employment, and not overeager to find it unless it suits his tastes, a person who is too old to be a boy and too young to be a man, who thinks he knows it all but who when the sum of his actual knowledge is estimated, is found to be sadly wanting; in short, just that sort of a person whom you might pass a dozen times in the same day, and not once remember that you had seen him before.

It was a sudden impulse, without any distinct cause or reason, that induced the detective to take up the trail of Señor Cortez.

If he had been asked on the spot to explain why he did so, he would have replied that he merely followed the promptings of intuition, and that in his extended career he had learned the value of treating intuitive perceptions with respect.

Just as the eye will involuntarily close to foil the approach of a flying cinder, so Nick Carter frequently acted with the involuntary directness that placed him upon the trail of the very man whom above all others he most desired to see and know. He had no idea of that fact at the moment. He was merely positive that the man whom he knew as Señor Cortez had not told him the exact truth, and, therefore, he desired to know more of the man.

"If he has lost his wife, he knows pretty nearly where she is now," was Nick's mental comment while he followed his man.

"If he really received the photograph, as he said he did, he either purposely left it in the safe, at his rooms, or he had it in his pocket when he was talking to me. The whole point of the matter is that he desired, for some reason, to have a good look at Nick Carter, possibly to employ me in earnest; I cannot determine that point yet, but all the same I'll have a little more knowledge concerning Don Murillo Cortez before I enter his employ."

It was a wise decision on his part, as results ultimately proved; and yet, more than once while they were on the way up Nassau Street, Nick was more than half inclined to permit Señor Cortez to go his way unshadowed, on the supposition that he was, after all, only a time waster.

Nevertheless, he kept upon the trail.

At the triangle where Park Row and Nassau Street meet, a large Panhard automobile was in waiting, and when the detective saw his man get into it he believed that for once he was on the point of finding it impossible to follow. He knew that he could not hope to keep that machine in sight for any considerable distance without being discovered; but, as it turned out, his fears were groundless.

Under the approach to the Brooklyn Bridge, the automobile stopped again, and Cortez got out. In another moment he was mounting the stairs to the elevated road, and Nick was close at his heels.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRAIL OF AN ARCH FIEND.

A celebrated preacher once chose as the subject of one of his greatest discourses the two words, "Little Things," and he began his remarks with the announcement that "there are no little things in the world." Nick Carter was present when that sermon was preached, and it made a great impression upon him.

This had been at the beginning of Nick Carter's career as the tracker of criminals, and the solver of riddles of crimes that to the men who considered themselves the greatest criminal catchers and crime solvers in the world had proved to be Gorgian knots.

Those of you who have followed the wonderful deductions and the masterly and careful manner in which Nick Carter always has conducted himself and directed his assistants when solving a crime, or when in the pursuit of a criminal, can well realize what a great bearing the words of this celebrated preacher must have had on the wonderful success which has always been the result of Nick Carter's being retained upon a case.

How many of you will remember the hundreds of times that the scene of a crime has been "combed" again and

again by the best of city or private detectives without finding the "little things," the button, the broken needle, the strand of hair, the position of footmarks, made on the surface of a heavy carpet, which Nick Carter has discovered, and which have proved to form the welding link in a chain of evidence so strong that the most able criminal lawyers of the American bar, hired by some person of great wealth and position, could not squirm and twist their clients from its fettering bonds.

Time and time again Nick Carter had impressed upon his assistants that "there are no little things in this world," and that the thing which the general run of detectives regard as a little thing almost invariably proves to be the one big, salient piece of evidence that would nail the crime to the guilty person, while the thing which seems to the dwarfed minds of other detectives to be the big thing has kept them barking up the wrong tree till, to their chagrin, they turn to find that Nick Carter had the quarry caught and caged, and had been able to do it on "some darn fool little thing that nobody could have thought of, and that that man, Carter, must have just stumbled upon."

But Nick Carter had not just "stumbled upon" it. He had been looking for the "little things."

Hundreds of times during his career in after years he was reminded forcibly of the truth of that assertion, and on this particular day, while he was upon the trail of Murillo Cortez, the significance of its soundness was brought home to him.

It was an extremely small thing that happened, too, so small that it is doubtful if another than Nick Carter would have taken notice of it; it is even doubtful if Nick himself would have been cognizant of the occurrence had he not been engaged in scrutinizing with extreme care every move that Señor Cortez made.

The two boarded a Third Avenue elevated train at the City Hall station. At Twenty-third Street Cortez left the car, and Nick, of course, followed.

When they descended to the street, and just as they were about to cross the avenue, a crosstown trolley car came into violent collision with a trolley car of the Third Avenue line.

For a moment the air was filled with flying glass, shrieks, and cries, and there was general confusion everywhere, but it was quickly ascertained that only one person had been injured, and that one not severely.

A piece of flying glass had struck a beautiful young woman and inflicted a deep gash in one of her rosy cheeks—a wound which must inevitably leave a disfiguring scar.

Señor Cortez—and therefore Nick—were among the throng that gathered around her, and, somewhat to the surprise of the detective, it was the handsome individual with the Spanish name, whom he was pursuing, who was one of the first to offer his assistance to the injured young woman, and who escorted her into a near-by drug store.

She proved to be brave as well as beautiful, and remained upon her feet while those around her endeavored to stanch the flow of blood from the ugly wound.

Then an ambulance arrived and the surgeon discovered that he could dress the wound, and that the injured woman could proceed on her way without going to the hospital.

This she did, and it so happened that Nick and Cortez

passed from the drug store into the street side by side, and this is how the "little thing" happened.

Cortez turned to Nick. He had something to say, and did not much care to whom he said it, so, quite naturally, he addressed the person nearest to him.

"The accident might have been much worse," he said. "It is strange that there was nobody killed."

"Yes," said Nick. "But it is bad enough as it is. There is a beautiful girl, scarcely out of her teens, who will be disfigured for life."

"Assuredly. Yes. To be sure, to be sure! I had forgotten that. Thank you," was the astounding reply that Cortez made, and Nick cast one glance of utter disgust upon him, just in time to see him uncover his gleaming white teeth in a smile that was cruelly complaceant.

"One might suppose that you are glad of her misfortune," remarked the detective.

For an instant the stranger regarded Nick with a piercing glance that seemed to read through his disguise, and then he replied in a tone that was entirely different, and which was so utterly hard that all the rich mellowness of his voice was lost in it:

"Misfortunes come to all alike. Those among us who are alive to-day survive because others suffer and die."

Then he strode rapidly westward along Twenty-third Street, while Nick, falling in behind him, covered his face with a large handkerchief in the pretense of mopping his brow; but in doing so he pulled off the short yellow mustache and the wig of reddish hair he was wearing.

Hastily retiring into the doorway of a vacant store—but keeping his quarry in sight—Carter deftly substituted a brushlike black adornment for his upper lip. Then he tousled his own hair, folded his soft hat and placed it in his pocket, from which he produced a cap of the golf pattern, and then, after replacing a red tie where a moment before there had been a blue one, he was prepared to meet Señor Cortez face to face again, and to talk with him, if necessary.

When they reached Madison Square the stranger hesitated for a moment on the corner near the horse fountain, and then, seemingly with sudden and unpremeditated resolution, turned northward along the side of the park. He walked rapidly, and Nick kept approximately a hundred feet behind him.

Quite suddenly, however, when Cortez was about midway between Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Streets, he stopped, and, turning so that he faced the street, he remained there, in that same attitude and without moving, many minutes; so many, in fact, that the detective who had dropped upon a bench in an attitude of utter listlessness, wondered at his statuesque pose.

There was absolutely nothing out of the ordinary life of a city to see. Indeed, there was not even a vehicle passing during the entire time that Cortez seemed to gaze into vacancy, as if spellbound.

And then he did a strange—and for the moment an incomprehensible—thing.

He raised his right arm slowly to the level of his shoulder, and then, with a quick, and almost an imperceptible motion, seemed to throw something into the street. But nothing flew from his hand or fell from it.

Then Señor Cortez turned abruptly and crossed the park toward the Coronet Hotel,

Even as he did so, the revelation of the entire scene developed itself to the detective.

Like a flash, full knowledge of the identity of the man to whom Banker Gray had introduced him, and whom he was at that moment engaged in following, came to him.

"Upon my soul," he thought rapidly, "if there is any truth whatever in the tale told to me by Thompson, I believe this chap to be the very man; and if he is the man he is also the murderer of Thompson."

"Let me think it out a moment," he thought on while they crossed the park. "He told me in his letter that he would take especial delight and care to see me and talk with me. Very well, the introduction through Gray is his first move in that direction. He told me in his letter that he rejoiced in the sufferings of others, and it is certain that the man I am following was delighted at the thought that the beautiful girl who was injured will be disfigured for life. But that is not the most significant thing that has happened, by any means."

"According to the story that Chris Merrill, the chauffeur, told, the very spot where the murder of Thompson took place is where this fellow stopped just now, and, after gazing upon it for a time, in evident enjoyment, went through all the motions of throwing a knife at an imaginary victim."

"One thing is certain—I'll stick closer to him than a twin brother from now on till I know positively one of two things: That he is or he is not the man whom Thompson intended to describe to me."

For once, however, Nick Carter was mistaken in his prognostication of events. It was fated that he was not to stick closer than a brother to the object of his pursuit that day.

The man he was following entered quietly through the café door of the Coronet Hotel, and a moment later Nick did the same.

The detective waited just long enough to permit the door to swing shut, and then he opened it and followed, but quick as he was, Cortez had been quicker, for he was not in the barroom.

Quickly Nick crossed the short space that was between him and the door into the main corridor of the hotel, but even there he could see no sign of Cortez.

The man had not had time to cross the corridor to the washroom stairs without running, and if a man had run hastily through that place Nick was sure that he would have discovered some evidence of the fact upon the faces or in the manner of the regular loungers in the place.

There was, however, no sign that such an incident had happened.

Still, it was the only place where he could have disappeared so suddenly, and, after all, he might have run without attracting attention, which would leave its evidence behind, and so Nick, feeling certain that there was no other explanation of the occurrence, crossed the floor and descended the stairs.

In reality he did not pause at all, and he figured that if Cortez had gone that way he could not be more than five seconds in advance of him.

Nevertheless, as Nick soon discovered, the fact was that Cortez had disappeared, and the great detective was forced to confess to himself that he was nonplused.

Cortez was not downstairs. He was not in the corridor. He was not in the barroom. As far as Nick could determine, he was not in the hotel.

At last, the detective decided to question the cashier in the café, a young man whom he knew to be particularly observant and shrewd. Few people got past him without being seen, and recognized, too, if they had ever been in that room before, and in order to pass into the hotel proper by way of the café it was necessary to walk within two feet of the cashier's desk.

"How are you, Charlie?" Nick said. "I want a good cigar."

"Then after he had lighted it, and while he was counting the change, he asked various casual and impersonal questions, skillfully leading up to the question of chief importance.

"I just chased a friend of mine in here, but he got away from me," remarked Nick; "I wonder if you saw him. He was a tall, handsome fellow, smooth face, plug hat, gray coat, and—"

"Sure I saw him," interrupted Charley. "Didn't you?"

"Not after he came through the door. Where did he go?"

"He went out again."

"Ah! I see. Stepped to one side when I opened the door, so that the door itself would more than half conceal him, eh?"

"Just that. Then, while you were crossing the room, he slipped out again. He was out and gone again before you were well into the café. I saw it all, but it was none of my business."

"Certainly not. All the same, I wish you had called my attention to it. He's the greatest joker on earth, and I would have enjoyed catching him at it for once. Do you happen to know him?"

"I know him by sight. I don't know his name. He comes here every day."

"At any particular hour?"

"Oh, about this time."

Nick turned away and left the hotel, both puzzled and vexed. He knew that it would be an easy matter to learn all about the man under the name by which he was known at the bank, from Simon Gray, but he was annoyed to think that through mere carelessness he had been permitted to slip out of sight so easily.

But this incident was only the first of many that were destined to convince the detective that he was pitted against a man whose abilities were almost as great as his own.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHLOROFORM TRAP.

It was noon when Nick arrived at the morgue, and he had first returned to his own home and given particular attention to his disguise.

It was his intention, for this occasion at least, that neither Ten-Ichi nor Patsy should recognize him, and to that end he adopted the personality of a jolly-faced German who for the time being was carrying a burden on his mind, and who might own a saloon or a grocery store in some part of the city.

When he applied at the door for admission he drew the attendant to one side, and with an appearance of great anxiety inquired:

"Haff they fount Fritz?"

"Who is Fritz?" asked the attendant.

"Fritz was mine wife's papa. He wasn't come home by last nacht, und I tought meppy they was brought him here, already—yes?"

"You can go along inside and see; only there hasn't been a Dutchman brought here in a week."

"Nein? Ish dot so? Vell—vell! Dot's funny. But, you see, my wife's papa iss not a Deutchmans. He was a shentlemans—yes? Like dot man dere—sometings—yes? Mit a cray viskers, und a——"

"Go inside and look for yourself. There are three or four in there now."

So Nick entered the gruesome room, having attracted sufficient attention to himself to assure others that he was not seeking to avoid any.

But once on the inside, he found himself face to face with the second real astonishment of that eventful day, for standing over the slab upon which rested all that remained of the murdered Mr. Thompson was the very man who had so successfully eluded him at the café door of the Hoffman House—none other, in fact, than Señor Don Murillo Cortez.

He glanced up sharply when Nick entered, and for an instant seemed to bore through the detective with his matchless and wonderful eyes.

But the glance gave no evidence that the owner of the eyes regarded the last arrival with any other interest than that which he would have bestowed upon any chance visitor at the morgue, and Nick felt and believed that there was no recognition in the glance.

Patsy was there, also. He had a coarse brush in one hand and a cloth in the other, and was apparently busily engaged in some capacity about the establishment.

Ten-Ichi was nowhere to be seen.

Altogether there were a dozen persons and three corpses in the room. There were two bodies that had been taken from the river, and Thompson's; and the twelve persons who filled the number comprised Nick, Patsy and Cortez, four regular attendants, three men and one woman who were in the act of passing out while Nick was counting them, and upon whom he bestowed no attention, and one other, little, bent, rheumatism-racked old hag of a woman who was squatted in a corner near one of the empty slabs, and who stuck out a sinewy, clawlike hand in supplication when Nick approached.

"Py gracious!" said Nick, dropping a coin into her outstretched palm; "I should t'ink dis was a mighty poor place to peg—yes?" Then he passed on and in another instant was standing beside Cortez and looking down upon the dead face of Thompson.

Presently he turned to the man beside him.

"It loogs like Fritz, don't it?—yes?" he asked tremulously.

Cortez made no reply, but continued to gaze upon his victim.

"I said," repeated Nick, raising his voice, "I said dot it loogs like Fritz, don't it?"

Then Cortez showed his white teeth in a smile.

"Who is Fritz?" he asked.

"Who is Fritz? He was my wife's papa. He was gone ond, but he don't was come pack. I was tolt dat meppy he might be by dis place."

"And you think that this man resembles him?"

"Does he? Well I didn't say dot. He looks like him, but he ain't him—yes?"

"Evidently not."

Cortez turned away from the detective and motioned one of the attendants to approach.

"I can identify this body," he said, in his softest tones. "He was George Thompson, and he lived at the Hotel Elkhorn, in Ninety-third Street. I do not recall the number. If you will be good enough to conduct me to the proper official I will give all the necessary information."

As soon as the attendant, followed by Señor Cortez, left the room, Nick hurried to Patsy's side. The lad was already in the act of pursuing them, and he was plainly angry when a clumsy Dutchman nearly knocked him down; but he was reassured in an instant when he heard Nick's voice in his ear.

"Go with them, Patsy," he commanded. "Overhear every word he says. Keep with him till you have him safely in bed somewhere, then come to me at the house."

"Ten-Ichi hasn't been here at all," whispered Patsy, as he disappeared through the door. "I haven't seen a sign of him. Maybe something has happened to draw him away."

Then the door closed behind him and he was gone.

Nick turned back toward the slab on which Thompson was laid, and was in the act of bending over the silent form a second time, when he felt a tug at his sleeve, and, turning quickly, beheld the same withered old hag to whom he had given a silver quarter. She was close beside him again, with her hand outstretched, and as Nick was about to repulse her, he saw that her palm contained a tightly wadded ball of paper.

"Vell, vell!" he exclaimed. "I guess you vas a spryer old woman dan I thought, and I guess meppy you vas worth another nickel—yes? Goot! Dere it iss. So. Yes?"

He dropped a piece of money into the outstretched hand and took the wadded ball of paper at the same time.

Then, while he appeared to give his attention again to the corpse on the slab, he saw the old woman limp away through the doorway and disappear.

"Ten-Ichi," he said to himself mentally, still bending above the slab, "you are a jewel. I didn't think you had it in you. There is some reason, too, why you did not care to make yourself known to me here, so I'll just hold this bit of paper till I get an opportunity to see what it contains without being seen myself."

"A bright lad, that young Jap. He knew me, of course, when I spoke to Patsy, and it is quite evident, too, that he had some good reason other than the mere identification of Thompson for following Cortez."

"One thing is certain: Patsy doesn't know Ten-Ichi, but Ten-Ichi does know Patsy, and they are both working on the track of the same man. Well, I think I will let them work it out together, each in his own way. Now I must find a way to read what the little Jap has written on this paper."

He was alone now in the room with three of the attendants, one of the four having gone out with Cortez. Two of these were conversing together at the far end of the room, and the third was staring out through the bars at one of the windows, so pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, Nick made a great business of blowing his nose, and then, unobserved, he unrolled the ball of tissue paper that Ten-Ichi had given him.

Being there, it did not rattle, and Nick quickly had it spread open before him, concealed from the view of the others by the folds of his handkerchief.

This is what Ten-Ichi had written upon it:

"I know the man who killed Thompson. He has been here once to-day and he will come again. I suspected, when I read his letter this morning, but now I know who he is. I have heard of him before, often, and I have seen him once before, in my own country. He is a dangerous man. He is never without many of his slaves about him—men who are made slaves through fear of him—and women as well as men. He never goes anywhere without being shadowed and watched over by one, or even a dozen of his creatures. Be on your guard every instant of time. Do not relax a moment."

"If you should recognize me when you come, please do not give me any directions. I beg you to let me work in this matter in my own way—at least until I fail."

"If he comes here while you are here, and if, by any chance you have got upon his track, please let me follow him alone. Forgive me for this seeming impertinence."

"Remember this: For each eye in that devil's head, he has a dozen other pairs watching out for him. Now that he has threatened you, you will never be in safety for a moment of time, even in your own house, until that fiend is dead."

Nick blew his nose a second time and replaced the handkerchief in his pocket.

Two of the attendants were still conversing together. The third was still gazing out at the window.

Two more visitors had entered the place and were staring at the bodies on the slabs, and Nick, reluctantly admitting to himself that there seemed to be nothing more to do in that abode of death, passed out upon the street.

"For the first time in my life," he mused, smiling at the situation in spite of himself, "I find myself in the position of leaving everything to my assistants and doing not a thing myself. I think about the best thing that Nick Carter can do at the present moment is to go home quietly and think it over."

"Taxi, sir, take a taxi?"

The call was close behind him, and, turning, Nick beheld what appeared to be a private limousine drawn up beside the curb.

"Dot iss no public buzz vagon, mine friend," he said. "Vot you s'pose, hey? Dot I vas a billionaire, and want to buy a buzz vagon—yes?"

"Oh, this belongs to the doctor, inside the hospital. He's good for an hour yet, and I like to pick up an extra dollar when I can. If you don't want to go too far, and I can get back here inside of fifty minutes, I'll take you for a dollar."

"Goot! You take me by Madison Square and I giff you a dollar—yes."

"All right. Climb in. I'll have you there in a jiffy. That's dead easy."

"Who vas de dochter vot owns dis buzz vagon?" asked Nick, with one foot upon the step.

"I'm the doctor who owns it for this trip, and that's enough if I get you to Madison Square all right, isn't it?"

"Sure, Mike, sure."

Nick stepped inside the beautifully appointed limousine

and pushed the door shut behind him, and instantly he knew that he had walked into a trap.

With the closing of the door shutters dropped on either side and in front, effectually shutting out the light, and at the same instant he realized that he was being sprayed with chloroform from a dozen different directions at the same time, as if a score of bulb sprayers were playing upon him.

He made one maddened effort to escape by way of the door through which he had entered, but the potent drug was too powerful and the time was much too short.

In less than two minutes after he entered the limousine he was stretched senseless on the rug, and the vehicle was hurrying as fast as the man behind the wheel dared to drive, northward through the city.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAIDEN OF STEEL.

When consciousness returned to Nick Carter he was stretched upon a couch in a luxuriously appointed room and he was utterly alone.

There was still a suggestion of the sickening odor of chloroform in the air, and by this means the first half-dazed condition of unreality that was upon him gave place to clear recollection of the events that had immediately preceded his awakening.

After a moment or two of more vague conjecture, the full possession of his faculties returned to him and he got upon his feet.

Then he leaped to the window and threw it open, and a half dozen deep drafts of the fresh autumn air acted as a complete antidote upon the effect of the poison he had inhaled.

He noticed then that the window was protected by thick iron bars which were almost new, and which were firmly fastened in their places.

The view from the window told him nothing.

Save for a small clearing which immediately surrounded the house, there was a forest of trees upon every side, as far as he was able to determine.

"It is evident that they intend to make me comfortable, at least," he thought, turning back into the room and inspecting it with great care.

"What a strange thing for me to do to walk into a trap like that, with my eyes wide open, and Ten-ichi's warning in my pocket. Well, it isn't the first time. I did the same thing once before, long ago, when that fellow Caruthers wanted to sail away to Europe for the diamonds he was smuggling, but I didn't think that I would ever do it again, that is, intentionally. A trap of almost the identical pattern, too.

"The fact of the matter is," he continued, after a pause, "that life has been going along so easily with me of late, that I have grown to be a little bit careless. Evidently I will have to drop that habit. From the appearance of things I should imagine that this chap who calls himself Cortez could give the worst criminals I ever had to deal with cards and spades and beat them easily.

"All right, Mr. Man, or whatever your name is, you have taught me a lesson rather early in the game, and that is that you are not safe to trifle with. From this moment on I will take up the gamut you have thrown down, and if I don't make you regret that you ever came

to this country to make a fortune out of Nick Carter, for you to play with, I'll apply for admission to some old man's home and end my days there."

It was characteristic of Nick that the fact that he was a prisoner did not seem to trouble him in the least.

Perfect confidence in himself and in his great power to overcome obstacles, no matter how insurmountable they might appear to be, was second nature with him.

He was there, in that room, and a prisoner, true; but he was in his right senses, in possession of his full strength of muscle and brain, and he had no thought of fear of what the consequences of his imprisonment might be.

A careful search of his own person revealed the fact that his captors had not been remiss in their attentions to him. They had not left so much as a match in his pockets.

Even the two small but deadly weapons he was in the habit of carrying in his sleeves, and which he had so often used to great advantage, had been removed, and when he stepped in front of the mirror and took a view of himself, he smiled.

He was Nick Carter, sure enough.

Everything that he had used to disguise himself had disappeared, and his own handsome features, his own keen but kindly eyes, and his own crisp and wavy hair shone back at him out of the glass.

Upon his figure, however, there still clung the clothes that had belonged to the somewhat portly German whom he had represented himself to be when he visited the morgue, and that was why he smiled.

Then he remembered that he had not as yet tried the doors. He had not a doubt that they were securely locked, but there had been cases within his recollection when people had forgotten to lock their doors, and there was a bare possibility that this might be one of them. It was worth trying, anyhow.

Much to his surprise, the first door that he touched yielded.

"This was not forgetfulness," he thought. "This was the result of intention."

He pushed it open and passed through.

Then he paused, for he found himself in another room that was almost the counterpart of the one where he had awakened.

However, that was not why he paused. There was another reason.

There was a fire burning in the grate, and seated before it, with an open book upon his knees, was a man whom at first glance he supposed to be Murillo Cortez.

But the man had heard him approach from the adjoining room, and he rose and turned in his place, so that they faced each other. Nick determined then that he might or might not be the same, he confessed to himself in that instant that he could not be sure.

This man who faced the detective was as swarthy as an East Indian, and his head was swathed in the turban adornment of the East. His entire costume, in fact, showed that he belonged or wished to appear to belong to that quarter of the globe. Otherwise, that is, save for the complexion and the dress, and also an indefinable something which Nick could not at the time name, the man might have been Cortez.

There were the same strangely gleaming teeth, the same enigmatical smile, the same softly melodious voice, and the

same personality, as far as he could discover at that moment.

"You have awakened," he said, when Nick came to a halt on the side of the library table opposite him.

"Yes," drawled Nick, "I am really awake, and I have had strange dreams."

"Indeed?"

"I dreamed that I had occasion to visit the morgue, and that upon leaving there, I was induced to enter a limousine in which I was chloroformed and by which I was brought to this place."

The man with his back to the fire smiled again.

"That was no dream," he said, "that was reality, and your feeble attempt to pretend otherwise is very obvious to me."

"Oh, indeed. Thank you."

"How do you like these quarters, Mr. Carter?"

"They seem cozy."

"Will you be seated?"

"Oh, yes. I suppose you have something to say to me."

Nick dropped into a near-by chair in a manner that was perfectly unconcerned while the other man resumed the one in which he had been reading.

"Yes. I have something to say to you, and something to show you as well. But first permit me to introduce myself."

"Is that necessary? Aren't you the same individual whom Simon Gray introduced to me this morning at his bank on Nassau Street?"

"No. I am not the same individual, although I cannot blame you for supposing it, for we are really very much alike—and yet quite different. In fact, Mr. Carter, there are seven of us."

"Only seven?" Nick raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, believe me, I am quite serious. There are really seven of us who are sworn compatriots, and we are seekers after scientific truths. To distinguish ourselves, each from the others, we have taken the names of the first seven letters of the Tibetan alphabet. I am therefore, Dazaar, the fourth of the seven."

"And what do you call the one whom I met at the bank?"

"He is the seventh, and therefore is called Grachee."

"Well, you need not bother about the other five at the present moment, unless you greatly wish to do so. The thing that interests me most at the present time is this: Why was I brought here, and now that you have got me here, what are you going to try to do with me?"

"You were brought here, sir, because it was the expressed wish of one of the seven. Now that you are here, you will be regaled with a sight that it is seldom the fortune of man to witness. You shall witness one of the most exquisite bits of torture that human ingenuity ever conceived."

Nick smiled again.

"With myself as the subject of it, I suppose," he said.

"Oh, no, by no means. At least not for a long time to come."

"Who, then?"

"The name is not necessary at the present time. It is quite sufficient to know that this great treat is in store for you."

"Quite."

"Have you ever heard of the Iron Maiden?"

"The Iron Maiden of Nuremberg? Oh, yes."

"We have here an arrangement that is a great improvement upon that. It is hollow, and is shaped like a woman, as was the medieval instrument of torture, but in this case the spikes are made into delicate needles of steel and are of varying lengths so that actual death cannot come upon the person who is bound within it until the body of the maiden is actually closed tightly together. Even after that, I have twice been able to hear moans from the inside."

"You infernal beast!" said Nick sharply. "If I did not know that you are lying, and only trying to frighten me, I'd ram those words down your throat."

"Pray do not disturb yourself, Mr. Carter. I am not lying, neither am I trying to frighten you. Moreover, you could not choke me if you tried. In fact, you could not reach me at all, so do not make the effort. There is one more accomplishment that belongs to our maiden of steel to which I wish to call your attention."

Nick was silent, and he continued:

"The Iron Maiden of the Venetians became tightly closed in about six hours after the springs were set, and death often resulted within three hours, but with the Maiden of Steel it is different. She requires forty-eight hours to envelop her victims in her embrace, and whoever is enjoying her caresses cannot possibly die until after the last click of the closing spring has sounded. Oh, it is exquisite! Exquisite!"

CHAPTER IX.

"I WILL DIE GAME."

In spite of himself Nick could not withhold a shudder of repulsion when the handsome but swarthy creature who called himself by the name of Dazaar expressed himself so rhapsodically upon the exquisite joy of witnessing the prolonged suffering of another.

It was surely the aceticism of cruelty, and yet Dazaar bore no outward manifestation that he had harbored such devilish thoughts.

His face was calm, placid, and handsome. His manner was gentle, almost to femininity. His voice was harmoniously soft, like the purring of a sleepy cat, and his entire personality might suggest anything else in the world rather than the sentiments he had expressed.

But the detective by no means accepted as truth the statement Dazaar had made concerning his associates.

It was true that this person and the man he had met in the bank in Nassau Street were of an entirely different personality, but it was equally true that they seemed very much alike in many respects.

"Was there, after all, seven of these angelic-appearing monsters who were working together in the confessed heinous occupation?" Carter asked himself, "or could there be but one who possessed the devilish talent of wearing at different times seven different identities? Was this Dazaar in reality a hydra-headed human monster who went about plying evil and inflicting torture whenever and wherever it was possible for him to do so?"

It may occur to the reader as remarkable that the detective permitted himself to remain, even for a moment, in the company of such a human monstrosity without making an effort of any kind to escape from the house in which he found himself a prisoner, and from grasping

with this incarnated devil, but the reader must remember that even though Nick had been taken there against his will, he was none the less there for a purpose, and moreover that he was not the one to attempt to do things by halves.

The point with him was just this: He found himself unexpectedly in the presence of the very man whom above all others he wished to see and to study—for he still doubted the statement that this personage was only one among seven—that, in short, there were six others who were equally repulsive, cruel, devilish, and mad.

He had regained possession of his senses and his strength, and he was not afraid to face seventy instead of seven, if it should prove necessary to do so; and, before he made an effort to get away, he was resolved that he would do all that could be done to uncover the mysteries that he realized were at hand.

Therefore, he seemed to remain perfectly passive, while he awaited developments of some kind. He knew that developments must come, but just what form they would take he could not, of course, anticipate.

But he was soon to learn.

"I have told you," said Dazaar, in his softest and most wooing tones, "that I had something to show you, as well as something to say to you."

"Yes, I believe you did," replied Nick.

"First, then, in order that you may be convinced of the futility of any effort to escape on your part, I will demonstrate how well and thoroughly we are guarded. Have you taken notice of the panels with which this room is surrounded? I have but to clap my hands together and you will at once understand their purposes. See?"

He clapped his hands, and instantly the panels, thirteen in number, swung outward into the room, revealing the fact that behind each of them, standing like so many statues done in ebony and bronze, was a huge and strangely attired Tibetan, ringed and braceleted, robed with rich drapery which fell from the shoulders to the floor and which was evidently so arranged that it could be cast aside instantly to secure perfectly free movement of the arms and limbs.

The detective was afforded only a glimpse of them, however. Just sufficient to assure himself that they were alive. Then Dazaar clapped his hands a second time and the panels closed.

"Wherever you happen to be while within these walls," said Dazaar, with his blazing smile, "there will never be an instant when those eyes are not upon you. I tell you this to warn you of the fruitlessness of attempted effort against me—or my watchmen."

"Is that what you intended to show me?" asked Nick.

"Oh, no. Something infinitely more entertaining."

"Well, fire away. Let the show begin."

"You have, I believe, an assistant whom you call by the name of Patsy?"

"I believe I have, yes."

"You are rather fond of Patsy, I am told."

"Well, yes, I am."

"He is now a captive here, like yourself."

"Indeed."

"Yes. He followed one of the seven, and he followed him too far."

"I see. Is he, perhaps, the only captive you have here, besides myself?"

"The only one who can possibly have any interest for you—yes."

"Good," thought Nick silently. "In that case, Ten-Ichi is still at liberty." Then he added, aloud:

"Am I to understand that you really have other captives?"

"Certainly. There never is a time when we are without sources of amusement. Without a captive to put to the torture, life would hang heavily upon our hands. There would be no joy in living."

"Indeed. I think I can understand that. Well? Are you going to show Patsy to me?"

"Yes. I will take you now where you can feast your eyes upon him."

"And talk with him?"

"No. There will be two walls of thick, but perfectly transparent glass between you, through which no sound can travel. You will be denied the pleasure of hearing his cries of agony and pain, but you will be able to see how he suffers, even though you cannot hear him."

"What do you mean, you devil?"

"I mean that it is my intention to afford you the unalloyed joy of seeing your assistant reveling in the caresses of the Maiden of Steel."

Nick did not know how to reply, so he made no reply at all. The fact was that he did not believe the statement.

A refinement of cruelty so devilish that it intended to inflict no physical pain upon his own person, but which would compel him to be a witness of suffering visited upon those he loved, was almost beyond his comprehension. It certainly seemed too inhuman for belief, although Nick's knowledge of criminal nature, acquired by his own experiences and by careful study of scientific work on criminology, should have convinced him, at this crisis, that there were fathomless depths of cruelty to which only such degenerates as this Dazaar may plunge.

"Come," said Dazaar, rising. "We will go now to the room from which you will witness this rare sight."

He clapped his hands again, and once more the panels opened.

This time the giant blacks stepped outward into the room, while Dazaar raised his right hand and pointed toward one of the openings beyond a panel, which appeared, as Nick gazed through the narrow way, as if it might lead into the open air outside the house. A second glance, however, proved the falsity of this idea, for he could see that the passage did indeed lead into a room of glass which was built into the court or patio of the house.

Dazaar stepped forward until he was close to the passageway, while the blacks grouped themselves in a semi-circle behind them. Then Dazaar raised his hand again, and pointed through the opening.

"Precede me," he said. "Take my word for it, no harm will come to you this day, nor for many a day to come. In fact, you will, in a few hours—say forty-eight—be at liberty to return to your home, none the worse, save in spirit, for this expedition; but you may also take my word for it that the day will surely come when you yourself will be forced to endure all that you will see endured to-day. This is merely a foretaste of what is to come, but you are personally in no danger now, unless you choose to resist."

"And in that case?" said Nick grimly.

"In that case you will simply put these slaves to the trouble of binding you. Naturally you will prefer the free use of your limbs while you are in that room, therefore precede me."

Nick realized the present hopelessness of resistance, and so, without hesitation, he stepped into the passageway.

The brain of the great detective was tortured with a thousand plans and devices to save Patsy from the awful death that awaited him.

Outward calmness was a noted characteristic of the detective. But this calmness of feature and bearing, which had been so wondered at by all those who had beheld it, and which had seemed almost uncanny to its beholders, was but the outward reflection of an inward calmness, far more wonderful in its control.

To make one's face a mask of serenity, while within that handful of gray matter, known as the brain, thoughts of agony, anguish, and despair are seething in a jumbled whirlpool of thought, takes long training and great self-control. But to keep the brain clear and calm under such conditions as these; ah! there are few who can do this.

Alert, watchful, ready to grasp the first frail straw of opportunity that, by some strange chance, might come his way, Nick Carter's brain took up each chance, each possible whim of fate that might enable him to turn the tables on the captors of Patsy and himself.

Instantly, when he crossed the threshold, the door closed behind him, and he found himself alone, but ahead of him was the sun-lighted room, and with three steps more he had passed into it.

It was indeed in the court of the house, but that was not all.

In the very center of the court was a square, boxlike house of thick plate glass, and within that small edifice, which was approximately ten feet square and high, plainly before his vision, was the hideous Maiden of Steel.

As Nick looked upon the steel statue, one side of it was open, and the long, slender, polished needles which projected from the front of it gleamed savagely and threateningly in the sunlight. They were pointing outward now, but Nick was well aware of the hideous office they performed.

But he scarcely saw the needles at all.

He realized instantly that Dazaar had told him the truth about Patsy, for there, indeed, was the lad, bound so tightly that he could not move head or hand, foot or knee.

The young assistant was, in fact, confined inside the Maiden of Steel, against her back, which was the immovable part of the hellish design, and in front of him, with many of them no doubt already beginning to prick his flesh, gleamed the needles which slowly but surely moved inward, a thousandth part of an inch at a time, and which ultimately, when the springs of the machine had done their work and the Maiden had closed her murderous embrace, would pierce him through and through.

Patsy saw Nick at the same instant Nick discovered him. He had indeed been told that his master and chief would appear in that window to witness his suffering. But the lad was so tightly bound that he could make no sign—that is no sign save one, but that one he made instantly. He smiled—bravely and defiantly smiled!

To Nick it was as if he had said in words:

"If I am to die, I will at least die game."

CHAPTER X.

TO THE RESCUE.

It must be remembered that Nick did not possess a weapon of any kind—not so much, even, as a lead pencil, or a pasteboard card.

Everything had been taken from him while he was unconscious from the effects of the chloroform that had been administered so strangely; but it must also be remembered that his captors, when they permitted him the free use of his arms and legs, had not taken into account his wonderfully great strength, which was almost more than human, and which has never been counterparted in another save perhaps in the noted strong man, Sandow, of whose prowess every reader of these pages is aware.

But Nick's marvelous strength was seldom called upon to its full powers of exertion, and, therefore, even those who were more or less aware of his power did not know to what great excesses it might be put. It is doubtful if Nick realized it fully himself.

In fact, he was like the electric motors that Edison makes. They, as you know, are capable of exerting, in emergencies, two hundred per cent in excess of their natural power, so that a six-horse power motor can really exert the power of eighteen horses for a short lapse of time. This comparison is made in order that the reader may understand exactly why it was that when Nick raised his right foot and drove it, with all the strength he could summon, against the thick glass in front of him, that had been intended to resist more than human power, it was shattered into a million fragments by the impact, and fell with a crash into the court below.

It was the work of a fraction of a second for him to follow the shattered glass, and yet, notwithstanding his quickness, he had scarcely landed upon the flagging of the courtyard, when, as if in response to the crash, many doors which surrounded it seemed to fly open like magic, and from each one leaped into appearance the figures of the huge blacks.

But even before they came into view, Dazaar himself leaped into the space surrounding the glass house in which Patsy was a prisoner.

But nobody—neither Nick nor the men who sprang out of the house to attack him—was prepared for the next event.

Even as Nick lifted a huge flag from the paving of the court and sent it crashing through the glass that surrounded the Maiden of Steel, and while the blacks were rushing down upon him on every side with Dazaar well in advance of them, a cloud seemed to come between them all and the sun, a huge substance fell among them, seemingly from the sky into the midst of the courtyard and burst, with a sound not unlike the bursting of a huge bag of paper—which, in fact, it was.

But the effect of it was instantaneous and remarkable.

The whole courtyard seemed on the instant to be filled with an impalpable dust, so fine that it flew in every direction and pervaded the entire place, so pungent that it filled the eyes and nostrils of every person present, and so blinding that its effect was as if they had suddenly been hoodwinked.

But more than that, it was also stupefying, and even Nick, who had already passed through the broken glass into the small house where Patsy was confined, felt his

senses reel even while he tugged vainly upon the straps that confined his assistant within the embrace of the Maiden of Steel.

Nick Carter remembered afterward something of the sense of despair that came over him at that instant, even while he essayed to set Patsy free—and then he lost consciousness utterly.

What happened during the succeeding few moments Nick never knew until he was told about it later by Ten-Ichi; but what actually did happen was this:

The remarkable prowess of the young Jap has been hinted upon earlier in this story, but little has been said regarding it. The fact is that he had been trained from his infancy for the very work he had undertaken when he applied to Nick Carter for instruction in detective work.

There was nothing in the realm of Japanese jugglery that was unknown to him, and there was nothing which a long line of ancestry in Japan had acquired in the sciences and in black art, which had not descended to him, so that as a matter of fact, in obtaining his services, Nick Carter was securing an assistant whose value cannot now be estimated, but who was destined to prove, as the readers of this series will realize, that there are wonders connected with human accomplishment that are as yet undreamed of by us, who live in the worlds occidental.

Ten-Ichi, as we know, disguised as the old hag, had followed Cortez from the morgue, as also had Patsy. But Patsy had been captured, and so had Nick Carter, but Ten-Ichi had managed to remain unknown and unsuspected.

More than that, he had been able to keep upon the trail of the man he followed, and had succeeded in tracking him to his den, and here a small circumstance of which Nick was not aware had greatly assisted him in his preparations for the work he had to do.

Nick believed that he had awakened the same day that he was captured, but in that he was mistaken, for really he had been kept drugged almost two days while the preparations for the torturing of Patsy were completed, and that was the time which was afforded to Ten-Ichi to work.

The polpa powder, with which the bag was filled, was comparatively easy of manufacture did one but know the ingredients, and a quick trip to the city secured them for Ten-Ichi.

The bag which contained the powder was not larger than his own head, but it was sufficient, as he afterward explained to Nick, to put an entire regiment to sleep—and, once stupefied by the effects of the powder, a man was safe not to regain consciousness for an hour.

Ten-Ichi was not entirely ignorant concerning the men against whom he had to contend. He knew something of their history, as was suggested in the note he wrote and gave to Nick while they were in the morgue; but whether there were really seven men, or only one, he did not know.

He did know, however, that Dazaar—and his associates, if he had any—were in reality human devils, and that they had worked their machinations in many countries, Japan among others.

To approach the house to which he traced Cortez, he had to resort to the nighttime, and in order to make an effective assault upon the citadel of infamy, he knew

that he must be supplied with the polpa powder, and also with a ladder of silken ropes which he could readily conceal about his person.

Such a ladder was among the effects at Nick's house, and the powder he could manufacture, and thus it was that during the night preceding the scenes just described he had gained access to the roof, and thus it was that he was there at the crucial moment, awaiting an opportunity to save Patsy, whom he had seen when the men strapped him within the Maiden of Steel.

He did not know that Nick was also a prisoner in the dread house, until he saw him enter the observation room, and almost instantly thereafter send his heel crashing through the glass walls of the room.

Then he acted quickly.

When Nick leaped into the courtyard, and was immediately followed by the throng of black Tibetans, Ten-Ichi knew that it was time to act.

He knew perfectly well that with the bursting of the bag the polpa powder would strike Nick and Patsy, as well as the others, into unconsciousness, but there was no other way, and so he threw the bag into the very midst of them. The effect was almost instantaneous, as has been already seen.

With Nick and Patsy, it was less quick than with the others, because they were in a measure protected by the glass wall of the house where the assistant was confined; but they nevertheless succumbed.

Ten-Ichi was fully prepared.

With a large rubber bag, much greater in extent, but not unlike a football mask—with that protection over his nostrils and mouth, he swung himself into the courtyard by means of his silk ladder.

His first act there was to free Patsy from the Maiden, and this he accomplished with a few slashes of his knife and by the snapping of several of the needles which had already commenced their hellish work of piercing the flesh of their victim.

Then he dragged Patsy to the foot of the ladder, fastened it beneath his arms, mounted, and pulled the lad up after him, and, once on the roof, he poured from a vial into Patsy's mouth a liquid which made him shudder and open his eyes almost immediately.

"You are all right, Patsy," he whispered, "but there is no time to lose. Your strength will have come back to you by the time I have returned for the chief and fastened him to the ladder also. You must then pull him to the roof and pour ten drops out of the vial between his lips. No more than ten, remember. Then lower the ladder again, for there is one more down there whom we must take with us."

"Dazaar?" asked Patsy.

"Yes, Dazaar."

He said no more then, but leaped again down the ladder into the courtyard.

Two minutes later Patsy hauled Nick to the roof, and again, within two minutes, the swarthy Dazaar was stretched upon the flat surface of the roof, with Nick, Patsy, and Ten-Ichi looking down upon him.

"Honorable sir," said Ten-Ichi, speaking rapidly to Carter, "will you permit me to advise just this once? I know it is your desire to capture the whole number of men who are in this house, but I also know that at almost any moment others are likely to appear and recapture us.

You have no idea of the hellish devices they have at hand for overcoming any effort of defense we might make."

"Well, speak on, Ten-Ichi."

"We have the master fiend in our power. Perhaps we can get away with him. Let us try now to escape with Dazaar, for it is he who murdered Thompson, and it is he who is the ruler here. Without him, I believe, although I do not know it to be true, that the others are powerless for doing evil."

Half a mile from here I have a horse and a covered grocery wagon hidden in the woods. Between us we can carry Dazaar there. Let us do that, I beg of you; and once we have this arch fiend safely behind the walls of a prison, let us never cease for one moment to keep watch over him until the moment when we know that he is dead."

We have only thirty or forty minutes left now before the men down there will begin to revive, and I beg that we lose no chance of getting Dazaar safely into custody."

"Ten-Ichi," said Nick, placing one hand kindly upon the shoulder of the Jap, "I owe it to you to agree to what you say, even if I did not realize, as I do, that it is the wisest course."

"Come. We will go. But remember, Ten-Ichi, from this moment you are Nick Carter's friend and brother, as well as his assistant."

"I thank you, I will be faithful unto death, as you will some day know."

"I know it now, Ten-Ichi."

Then they left the roof.

To do this was no easy matter. But the silken ladder which Ten-Ichi had brought with him, and with which he had made his way to the roof of the house in which Nick Carter and Patsy Garvan had been held captive, was made with great cunning, and was strong enough to have borne a ton weight without breaking.

Now fully revived, Nick Carter, with the aid of Patsy and Ten-Ichi, placed the inert body of Dazaar over his shoulders, as you have seen firemen place an unconscious person whom they are rescuing from a burning building by means of a scaling ladder, and made his way to the ground without mishap. Here he was quickly joined by Patsy and Ten-Ichi.

Taking time to look about him, the detective saw that he was in that section of Greater New York which lies along the banks of the Hudson and is known as Riverdale. This section is, in many parts of it, the same as it was forty or fifty years ago. The houses, many of them built in colonial style, stand well back from the road, and are surrounded by trees and ornamental shrubs, which, in many cases, shield the house from persons passing along the thoroughfare upon which they front.

It was one of these houses that Dazaar had in some manner been able to rent or purchase.

Keeping well under cover, Patsy, at Nick's direction, ran back of the house and onto some sheds, which stood near the barn. Here Patsy obtained a small hand cart, such as are used by the corner grocer for delivering orders, and also by gardeners, and in which, with the aid of a rack, they gather leaves and grass about a country place.

Returning to his companions and the unconscious Dazaar without having been observed, Patsy trundled the cart into their midst.

Without ceremony, Dazaar was thrown into the cart, and

with Patsy at the handle and Nick and Ten-Ichi each pushing at either side, the little three-wheeled vehicle with its strange load was rushed down the long drive, and over the country till the place where Ten-Ichi had left the horse and wagon was reached.

The horse and wagon were found just as Ten-Ichi had left them, and it was the work of a moment to bundle the still unconscious form of Dazaar into the wagon.

"Mighty quick work," said Nick, with a satisfied smile.

"Some going," replied Patsy, as he assisted Nick and Ten-Ichi in binding the legs and arms of Dazaar, who still showed no sign of returning consciousness.

This accomplished, to the satisfaction of Nick, Patsy untied the horse from the tree to which he was tied, and, jumping to the seat, took up the lines and put the horse at a sharp trot.

The trip down the hill and to the Kingsbridge police station was made in short order.

Probably the most surprised man in New York was the captain of that precinct, which comprises the Kingsbridge section of New York City. He was standing on the steps of the station house when Patsy pulled up the sweating horse, and requested him to "Take a look inside, cap."

"Well, I swan, if that don't beat the Dutch," was the captain's comment, when he viewed the interior of the wagon and saw Nick Carter and Ten-Ichi seated on Dazaar, into whose face was creeping the light of returning consciousness.

"Looks as if you had some one there you did not want to get away from you, Nick," the captain ventured.

"He is, indeed," was the great detective's grim rejoinder.

"Captain," went on Nick, "if you will be kind enough to extend to this gentleman the hospitality for which you are noted, in that you cling with the tenacity of a bulldog to your unwilling and ungrateful guests, until I am able to have my chauffeur and limousine come here and convey him to headquarters in more fitting style than that which he is now traveling, I will be obliged to you."

"Certainly, Nick," rejoined the captain, who turned and called to the doorman to summon some policemen from the wardroom of the station house.

It did not take Danny, Nick's chauffeur, long to make the run to Kingsbridge, and the run to police headquarters with Patsy on the front seat and Nick and Ten-Ichi inside with the prisoner.

When police headquarters was reached, a few words from Nick to the sergeant at the "desk" was all the formality which was required to lodge Dazaar in a cell.

"The tables are turned, Dazaar," said Nick Carter, as he was about to leave his prisoner in a cell at police headquarters. "There is a triple watch placed over you here, and I do not think you will be able to find a way to give us the slip."

Dazaar smiled, showing his gleaming teeth.

"I will yet have an opportunity to offer you the caresses of the Maiden of Steel, Mr. Carter," he said. "In the meantime, I bid you good night. You have come nearer to winning my affection than any other human being has ever done, save my six associates, who will rescue me. You are the only man who has ever foiled me, even temporarily."

"Inspector," said Nick, as he was leaving headquarters, and speaking to the chief of the detective bureau, "I can-

not make my request too emphatic that not for one moment do you permit Dazaar to be unwatched."

The inspector smiled.

"I will produce him when the day for his trial arrives, never fear," he replied.

Then Nick bade him good night and returned to his home.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 42, will contain "The Queen of the Seven; or, A Beautiful Sorceress." This will introduce to you a beautiful Russian countess, who will puzzle you as she puzzled Nick. Dazaar will also appear again, and Ten-Ichi has some important work to do in this case.

IN BAD HANDS;

Or, Sheridan Keene's Help to Some Country Visitors.

13 By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLOT OF THE CONFIDENCE MEN.

"Can it be easily worked, think you?"

"Can it be easily worked?"

The man addressed echoed the inquiry in tones of derisive assurance, and with that particularly significant smile which, among certain types of the flash gentry and confidence men, denotes the discovery and profound appreciation of what, in the slang parlance of the same order, is commonly termed a "very soft mark."

"I should say, Sam, it could be easily worked," he hastened to add. "It can be done like rolling out of bed. It will be like money sent from home. It's a perfect cinch, Sam, or you can safely gamble I'd not have written you to come down here from New York."

"It would not have been very like you to do it, Ned, unless you thought you had struck a sure thing."

"You're right it wouldn't."

"And you should be clever enough by this time to know a sure thing from a hazard," laughed the man called Sam.

On that particular occasion he wore the conventional dress of a very respectable clergyman, and he appeared to be about sixty years old. He was less than forty, however, and a removal of the disguise he then wore would have revealed him to be a remarkably attractive and shrewd-looking man.

His full name was Samuel Rogers.

Among his most intimate friends he enjoyed the sobriquet of "Slippery Sam" Rogers, given him because of his rare success in hoodwinking the police, and in escaping punishment for numerous crimes and confidence games of which he had at various times been suspected. Both in New York and Chicago this same Sam Rogers, who then was posing as a gracious and benignant city parson, was known to be one of the slickest confidence men in the country.

His companion was the notorious Ned Weston, who twice had done time for swindling rural innocents out of their money and whose picture has for ten years been one of the adornments of the "rogues' gallery."

Yet Weston was still in the thirties, a gentlemanly and

well-dressed man, who then looked far more like a prosperous young broker, if not a man of means and leisure, than like a social outcast and professional swindler.

These two men then were seated in Weston's room in the Hotel Nantucket, on the famous old island of that name, with its quaint town and quainter people. The sun of a fair June day was gilding with its last yellow rays the broad stretch of ocean sweeping away to the south, and the white sands of the shelving shore and the brown hills of the upland.

Weston had been registered at the Nantucket for nearly a month, under the name of Edward West.

Rogers had arrived there only that evening, however, by the boat from Woods Holl, and in response to a letter received from Weston in New York the previous day.

Only some felonious project could have brought them together at such a place and under such circumstances, and, in response to another inquiry by Rogers, it was presently disclosed while they sat smoking their cigars.

"What is this sure thing, Ned, and how did you happen to stumble upon it?" Rogers asked.

"Am I not always looking for sure things?" laughed Weston.

"Yes, I will admit that."

"It happened in this way," Weston explained. "Because of an uncomfortable interest which Captain Devert formed for me about a month ago, I decided it would be wise to drop out of sight for a time."

"Before you were put out of sight, eh?"

"Precisely," nodded Weston. "So I jumped New York and came down here to Nantucket. It is sufficiently out of the way thus early in the season, and the resident Reubens have a happy faculty for telling you all about their own business and asking very little about yours."

"Which rather suited you under the circumstances."

"Very much so, since a disclosure of my history would not improve my social standing here," laughed Weston, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "In that respect, by the way, I have cut a figure."

"With the wealthy hotel patrons, I presume?"

"Quite the contrary, Sam," rejoined Weston. "I rather have devoted myself to some of the native rustics, and particularly to one of that talkative contingent who relieve the traveling public of their money by carting them about this quaint old place at so much a head, filling their lungs with dust, and their ears with stories about themselves and the various points of interest."

"A driver of one of the public carriages, I take it?"

"Precisely."

"Ah, I begin to tumble," smiled Rogers significantly. "Some one of these rustics has told you something of interest."

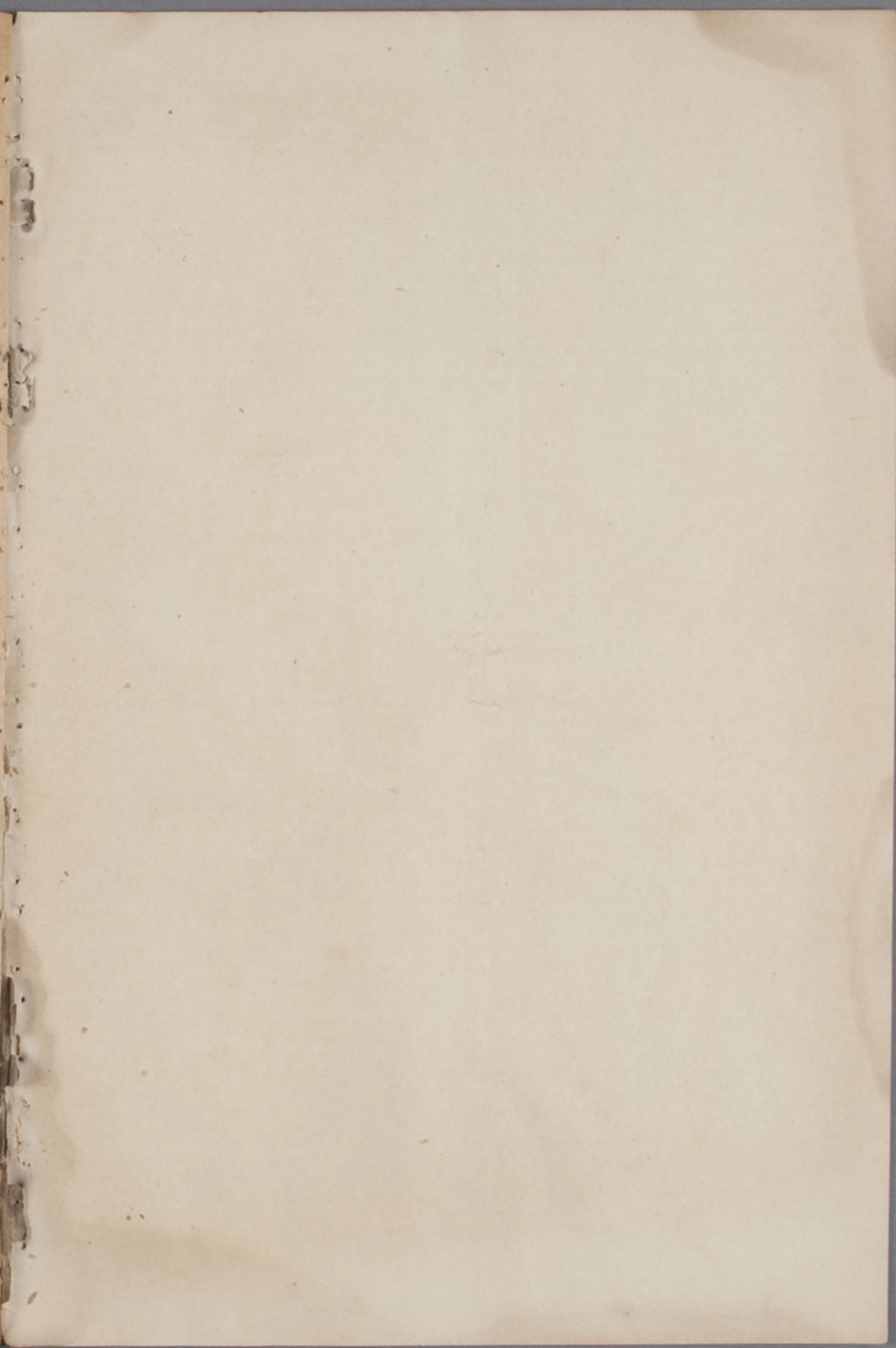
"Decidedly of interest," nodded Weston. "You, too, have encountered him, although you arrived but an hour ago."

"You don't mean the talkative chap who drove us up from the boat?"

"Four for one, Sam!" laughed Weston. "You have called the turn."

"What about him?"

"I'll tell you presently. I have gathered the facts while riding about with him during my stay here. He is a typical island jehu, and as green as a growing melon. His fund of information is confined solely to things local, and to his own personal affairs; and I soon learned not only his



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